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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 002891

SIPDIS

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NSC FOR TOM SHANNON AND MIKE DEMPSEY,  
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: THE UCR AT A CROSSROADS

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 0203

1B. BUENOS AIRES 4321

1C. BUENOS AIRES 4367

Classified By: Ambassador Lino Gutierrez for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (U) Summary: The election of Adolfo Stubrin as president of the national Radical Civil Union (UCR) convention provides the UCR the opportunity to reorganize the party and begin to build on its grass-roots strength to serve as a viable opposition to the ruling Peronist Party (PJ). Stubrin's first act has been to organize the opposition in the National Congress to oppose the GOA's attempts to grant special powers to Cabinet Chief, Alberto Fernandez. Stubrin and UCR National Committee head, Angel Rozas, need to build up the party's provincial base, make alliances with other opposition groups, promote greater transparency in the party's internal decision-making, and heal the divisions within the party in order to revive the UCR to its traditional place as a strong political force in Argentina. End Summary.

12. (U) On September 24, Adolfo Stubrin was elected to head the UCR convention, defeating former President Alfonsin's choice, Luis Caceres. Stubrin's candidacy was backed by provincial elites and members of the National Committee that want a break with the old Alfonsin leadership and a more confrontational stance taken toward President Nestor Kirchner's administration. The party is seeking to recover from the dismal two percent of the vote it received in the 2003 presidential elections, following a December 2002 party primary that was tarnished with accusations of fraud. The break with the old guard was by no means complete, as Rozas, who was a central figure in the 2002 primary disaster, remains in his position. However, the election of Stubrin provided some badly needed new blood into the party leadership at a time when the party has been struggling to deal with the dominance of the PJ in national politics. The UCR has the most Congressional seats of any party after the PJ, with 44 Deputies and 14 Senators. The party retains significant strength in many of the provinces and is the only opposition party with a grass-roots party organization throughout the country. The UCR also holds the governorships in Chaco, Catamarca, Rio Negro, and Mendoza and UCR candidate Gerardo Zamora leads in the polls for the February 2005 gubernatorial election in Santiago del Estero. Stubrin is seeking to build on this base to revitalize the party. The movement to replace the Ley de Lemas system with primaries in key provinces, such as Santa Fe, also provides an opportunity for the UCR to make inroads into traditional PJ strongholds. (Note: The Ley de Lemas, still utilized in several provinces, allows parties to run multiple candidates in elections, with seats going to the party, rather than the candidate, who receives the most votes. In practice, this system has been used by the PJ in provinces, like Santa Fe, to shut opposition parties out of power. For example, in the 2003 Santa Fe election for governor, Peronist Jorge Obeid was declared the winner, even though he only received 21 percent of the vote, while front-running Socialist candidate, Hermes Binner, received 36 percent of the vote. Obeid was elected because the sum of the Peronists candidates totaled 43 percent, while the sum of the Socialist candidates was only 38 percent.)

13. (U) Stubrin's first act as party congress head was to call for a unified opposition stand against the GOA's bid to give Cabinet Chief Fernandez powers, or "superpoderes", over the 2005 budget that are normally the exclusive right of the Congress. This effort is made more complicated because the last time these powers were invoked it was at the behest of UCR President de la Rua's government for then Minister of the Economy, Domingo Cavallo. Stubrin called for a meeting on Tuesday, October 12th of all opposition parties to organize a united front against the GOA's proposal. The call was met by opposition from the Alfonsin camp within the UCR, showing how far the party needs to go in order to achieve unity. However, Stubrin's initial efforts to oppose the GOA's request for "superpoderes" have been received favorably by other opposition leaders outside of the UCR. There is talk of an alliance between Recrear leader Ricardo Lopez Murphy and the UCR. Affirmation for an Egalitarian Republic (ARI) leader Elisa Carrio says that she will not enter into an

alliance with the UCR or any other party, although she supports Stubrin's efforts to oppose the granting of "superpoderes" to Fernandez.

**14.** (C) Former UCR Deputy Jesus Rodriguez recently told Poloff that the UCR's two top goals should be the restoration of transparency in the internal decision-making of the party and the formation of solid alliances with other opposition groups. Rodriguez worked tirelessly with other UCR members to ensure that Stubrin was elected and felt his election represented a new beginning for the party. Leading pollster Manuel Mora y Araujo recently remarked to Poloff that the UCR needed to purge all of its top leadership in order to be able to move beyond the stigma of the failed de la Rua administration and the 2002 primary debacle. (Comment: Some POL contacts continue to believe unproven allegations that Rozas was involved in vote rigging in the 2002 UCR primary, arguing that Rozas therefore needs to resign in order for the party to make a complete break with its troubled past. When fraud charges were first raised in the press after the primary elections, Rozas appealed to the electoral council for new elections in the disputed provinces in order to clear his name. When the request for new elections was denied, he resigned his leadership post in the party and only took it up again after new elections were completed in February 2003. See Reftels for more background.) Dr. Ruben Octavio Villan, who works for Deputy Marcelo Rafael Godoy, both formerly of the UCR, reported to Poloff that he was not optimistic about the long-term prospects of the UCR's attempts at alliances. Villan argued that the opposition groups are competing for the same minority share of the votes and are plagued with leaders with sizable egos, who are not capable of sharing the limelight.

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COMMENT  
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**15.** (C) The UCR is the only party with sufficient ground strength to organize a viable opposition to the PJ. The election of Stubrin and his recent attempts to build a united opposition front against the Casa Rosada's "superpoderes" proposal is a good start toward that end. The party continues to suffer from infighting between those aligned with Stubrin and Rozas and the Alfonsin wing of the party. Fortunately, the new party leadership has a year to work out the differences within the party in order to prepare for the next great challenge in the 2005 elections. The UCR is Argentina's oldest political party and has recovered from several crushing blows in the past, such as the 1930 military overthrow of Radical President Hipolito Yrigoyen and Alfonsin's forced early departure from office in 1989, to subsequently regain the reigns of leadership in Argentina. The next year will determine whether the UCR can once again rise from the ashes, or remain a divided, minor party.

GUTIERREZ